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25 June 1982

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Memo for [REDACTED]

Subject: Comments on TOR on Warning of War on the Korean Peninsula

1. This TOR strikes me as sound and comprehensive. I have no comments or suggestions on specific points, but some general reflections from an old warner might be useful.

2. Any intelligence information on the possibility of a North Korean attack is likely to be ambiguous and therefore subject to conflicting interpretations. It is understandable that DIA has concentrated on the "capabilities" and "military indications" approach, but this preoccupation with Pre H-Hour Scenarios is not an adequate foundation for warning at the "national" level. In my experience, it has had the effect of encouraging expectations and assumptions about the Community's ability to provide clear warning that are likely to be disappointed.

3. Given the nature of the North-South confrontation, it probably would be extremely difficult to distinguish between actual preparations for attack and a military bluff aimed at influencing ROK and US perceptions of the North's intentions. The strong likelihood of ambiguous warning suggests a need for considerable caution in defining the Community's ability to provide "timely warning." The hazard inherent in the "indications list" approach is that military preparations as viewed by military analysts as clearly foreshadowing an attack may in fact be deception or bluff calculated to deter ROK/US military initiatives (real or imagined) or at influencing political developments in the ROK.

4. In any situation involving the potential use of force, it is always difficult to define or describe precisely when the Community is likely to issue warning. Our experience over many years has been that warning, in most cases, is an incremental process and that it is hazardous to encourage consumers to expect or rely on receiving "warning" in a single authoritative statement. The most, and best, that the Community normally can manage is to convey a clear message that Country X is taking certain actions that will strengthen its readiness and ability to initiate hostilities. Confident warning judgments usually are beyond reach because of the ambiguity of information, uncertain reliability of sources, and the impossibility of judging intentions with precision and confidence. (You may wish to consult the NIE on Warning of War in Europe for language formulated for that problem).

5. Finally, our experience suggests that if warning is to be credible to senior policy makers and political men, it must convey plausible judgments of intentions in the national political/policy context as well as information on military preparations, deployments, logistics, etc. The political/policy and military dimensions of warning must be addressed together as an integral whole. In the absence of persuasive assessments of political intentions, perceptions and objectives, military indications may not be accepted as adequate or credible warning that would stimulate policy reactions.

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Special Assistant for Warning

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